No. 9.

THE THEOSOPHICAL FORUM.

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Each member can send questions, answers to questions, opinions, and notes upon Theosophical subjects. When necessary, the various communications will be condensed by the editor. Members will be careful to write on only one side of the paper and to use black ink.

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For paragraphs under the word "Ans." the editor is personably responsible.

January–February, 1890.

QUESTION XXXI.

Is it really true, as stated in a pamflet on Theosophy, that "the sense of justice in men is as yet but feeble, and in women hardly exists"?

Ans.—Yes, it is really true. If you will read Herbert Spencer, you will find both parts of this assertion abundantly demonstrated. The sense of justice is the most abstract and refined of all human faculties. For consider the two things involved in its perfect action. First, there must be an accurate comprehension, in any given case, of all the facts, circumstances, motives, impulses which have been elements therein; and second, the exact merit of the outcome must be determined with a judgment from which has been excluded every trace of prepossession, prejudice, emotion, or sympathy. As a delicate astronomical instrument has to be swathed in flannel to protect it from perturbations caused by warmth of the observer's body, so the still more delicate judicial faculty needs protection from the slightest deflection through passion or sentiment. To change the simile, there is perfect vision of a landscape only when there are no mists or currents, and when the glasses used are wholly achromatic.

Human beings are compounded of many qualities, but it is

notorious that none are so generally operative as those of feeling and desire. To overcome this tendency there is only one means,—training. Age will not do it, nor will experience unless utilized. Nothing will do it but a long process of careful self-culture, by which the judgment is deliberately detached from every fibre of self-interest or sentiment, and disciplined into action impartially exact. Now how many men have continuously, even occasionally, undertaken this? They are as rare as an Aristides.

There are two ways in which the theorem may be concretely proven. One is the state of legislation. The English are justly conceded to have the strongest sense of justice among modern peoples. Yet it is only within a hundred years that the death-penalty for trifling thefts has been abolished, and within much less that the right of a woman to her own property has been in any degree recognized. Even in our generation, a foreign territory has been forcibly seized and administered on behalf of English bondholders,—a flagrant breach of international principles and a wrong to taxpayers at home. Look at America. Partly from the election of incompetent legislators, and partly from the rivalry of judges in devising frivolous legal subtleties, justice is always uncertain and usually delayed, and the insecurity to property and life is the opprobrium of the land. Who ever knew of a Court concerned only with justice to the parties before it, or intent on anything else than precedents and punctilios? Yet England and America are the two freest countries on earth, and their judicial systems may be supposed to embody the general conception of what is justice and right.

The other way is by notice of contemporaneous thought. Do you find newspapers just to political opponents, impartial in their presentation of arguments and rejoinders? Do you find citizens conscientious where others' rights are concerned, slow to accept gossip, eager to hear both sides of questions, emancipated from prejudice, intolerance, and self-interest, prompt to insist that all other men shall have whatever they claim for themselves? Is it your experience that voters always support the policy they regard true, irrespective of its supposed effect upon their own purses? In short, how many men do you know

who speak and act only what is just, and shun an unfairness as they would a leprosy? You are silent! Very well; then the pamflet was correct.

And now about the women. It is no doubt the fact that women have keener intuition than men. They *see into* characters more quickly and deeply. But this is not to say that they weigh more accurately what they have seen. And, indeed, the merit, great as it is, is overborne by the dominance in them of the principle of sympathy, itself a merit, but out of place in questions of justice. The sense of beauty is a choice gift, but it has no function in a problem for mathematics or logic. A woman's responsiveness to suffering is instinctive and immediate, and her first impulse is towards relief. The method of relief might entail suffering much longer and more wide-spread, but that fact would not be perceived, nor, if perceived, would it be influential. Neither does she perceive her responsibility for a sound remedy, or the sufferer's responsibility for his suffering. If you doubt this, ask the first woman you see in tearful pity over an afflicted one, whether the affliction was from his own fault or that of others. She will unquestionably answer that she doesn't know, and anyhow that it makes no difference! In other words, the fact essential to the determination of justice is the very one she scouts as wholly immaterial! Constitutionally tending towards the side of pity, she does not perceive that the antithesis to justice is not mercy but injustice, nor that unscientific and merely sentimental treatment of sorrow enormously aggravates it at a later stage, and probably extends it to others innocent of wrong-doing. Of this the records of pauperism and of charitable societies give ample proof.

In America, far more than in other countries, the natural female inaptitude for justice is intensified by men's attitude to women. They are largely excluded from intelligent discipline, are petted and favored in irrational ways, and as irrationally are encouraged in extravagance, love of finery, petty social rivalries, and an unworthy servitude to contemptible fashions. Independent thought and action are discountenanced, high aims are never urged, and the constant stimulus is to the lower motives of vanity and selfishness. How can a sense of justice be

aroused under such conditions? It will never be till women are treated as rational beings, held to strict accountability for recognition of the rights of men and of other women, raised to be the companions, and not the playthings, of men.

Whether the sense of justice is feeble or strong in any particular individual can be tested in two ways. *First*, is he as quick to admit his own faults as those of others, and the palliations of faults in others as readily as when in himself? *Second*, is he careful to exclude irrelevancy, haste, ignorance, partiality from his judgments, and to see that they have no other prompting than the love of truth, no other aim than the expression of it? The test is as applicable to one's self as to one's neighbor. History records no instance of its being successfully borne by any large body of men or by even a group of women. It is not even true that the sense of justice is a welcomed or venerated trait. It elevates the possessor too much above ordinary humanity, it irritates the feeling of inferiority, it excites malignity towards that which is a reproach to pettiness. How truly human was the man who voted for the banishment of Aristides! But if a type of most men and of all women, then how impossible to do otherwise than repeat the assurance in the first sentence of this Answer, "Yes, it is really true."

QUESTION XXXII.

Is capital punishment consonant with Theosophy, as would be inferred from statements made on pp. 9 *and* 10 *of the last* FORUM? *Does the judicial murder of a criminal implicate in his karma all those concerned therein; and is not more danger to the community incurred from the astral influences evoked by the execution, and from the Elementary created, than from allowing the offender to live?*

W. C. T.—I cannot agree with the view expressed, that capital punishment is, from a Theosophic standpoint, right. Of course a great many persons think it proper on the ground that, if not continued, murders would increase. But such an opinion cannot grow out of a knowledge of Theosophy. Those who have read *Esoteric Buddhism* and H. P. Blavatsky's books know that, as man is composed of numerous "principles," some of

these must be, and are, violently thrown into the immediate sphere of the earth, when violently separated, as by hanging or beheading, or any other means causing sudden and violent death. And we further know that, when to this is added the fact that the astral man so thrown out is full of revenge and wickedness, his spook or shell is full of malignity, and is so nearly human as to be able to work the most awful evil upon living beings. Hence capital punishment adds new horrors to our life, and plants in our sphere evil intelligences that double the incitements and impulses to crime.

It is true that to let the murderer live does not compensate the family of the one murdered, but his violent death does not do so either. We take his life on the theory that others will be deterred, or because we fear that our successors may let him go free. But the records of crime do not show that capital punishment will at all lessen crime. There is no more thieving now than ever, and murders are no more common in America now than they were in England when capital punishment was the penalty not only for murder but also for theft.

Murder, however, is a different crime from any other. It usually is due to haste and anger, while theft and other felonies are due to premeditation. Hence legal penalties do not deter from murder, because in haste and anger the blow is struck and the murder done, without a thought or a reflection as to what the consequences may be for the slayer.

If we are Theosophists,—unless we wholly reject the sevenfold division of man, we must shudder at taking the life of any murderer, and all the more if he be a criminal in other respects. For by his death we really bring more evil of a most insidious character into operation; whereas by confining him for life we protect the community and give the murderer his whole life chance, and permit him to die naturally and allow his "principles" to separate from each other in due course.

J. M. P.—Not only does common-sense dictate that "hanging is the poorest use that can be made of a man," but also a consideration of psychic laws shows that capital punishment increases crime by creating new hypnotic suggestions in the astral

light and by intensifying the evil pictures it already contains. Thus when the astral reproduction of the execution is witnessed the crime and the trial are also seen, and the same evil psychic influences which caused the original crime may be perceived at work among the witnesses, spectators, and all in any way concerned with the judicial murder, and often implanting themselves in children yet unborn, making them constitutional criminals. On grounds of expediency, hanging cannot be defended.

But apart from the question of expediency (which, because necessarily considering every issue from the standpoint of *self*, whether an individual self or a collective self, as that of a community, is an unsafe guide in ethics) it is evident that capital punishment is diametrically opposed to Theosophical conceptions of life. It can be logically defended only upon a basis of *punishment*,—the element so distinctly recognized in Calvinistic theology in its pleasing tenets "anent" eternal damnation. The criminal "deserves it," and his crime excludes him from all human mercy, just as the damned soul "deserves it" and is shut out from the mercy of the Calvinistic God. Now, if the basic teaching of Theosophy is true, namely, that all beings have emanated from one "Root-Substance" and must eventually be again merged into it, then it follows that the one law of being must have three aspects: (1) differentiation, the out-going impulse; (2) aggregation, the returning impulse towards unity; (3) a transitional stage at that point where the out-going tendency exhausts itself and the return to unity begins. The first is the law as it applies to animal life, the law of force, "the survival of the fittest," the cold cruelty of material nature; the second is the law of divine beings; while the period of transition belongs to the human stage. Man, "in doubt to call himself a god or beast," because, occupying this intermediate point, he participates in the nature of each, has yet neither the innocence of the brute nor that boundless charity and love for all beings which is ineradicably associated with our conceptions of a God. Oscillating between the two, humanity endeavors to equate the rights of individuals by repaying good with good and evil with evil—"an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," a life for a life. This is human "justice," merely relative in its nature, being

based upon relative conceptions of good and evil; so that, even as "relative truth is the cause of all illusion," so relative justice (our human notions of justice) is the producer of all injustice; nor can justice and injustice be regarded as strictly antithetical. The true antithesis to both is mercy or compassion, as intuition recognizes, and as the incarnated Gods have uniformly taught by enjoining men to love their enemies, to overcome evil with good. Carrying the law of brute life into the purely human stage works havoc, and to attempt to convey our imperfect human notions of justice into the realm of divine harmony is even more disastrous. Therefore, no Theosophist trying to live the Higher Life should establish his working theories of life—escially those relating to needed moral and social reforms—solely upon imperfect human conceptions of law and justice, any more than he would base them, as some modern materialists have sought to do, upon the law governing brute existence; but he should in all matters of Right and rights endeavor to follow, in thought at least, the law of *compassion*, the truer justice of the Gods. "Compassion is no attribute. It is the LAW of Laws—eternal harmony, Alaya's SELF; a shoreless universal essence, the light of everlasting Right, and fitness of all things, the law of love eternal."

Ans.—(1) Read and master the *Ans.* to Question XXIX; all of it, indeed, but particularly lines 8–10, 12, 13, 29–33, 39, 46, 47, 53. (2) Struggle to reach the heart of the problem and to grasp it intelligently. (3) Study out why your sympathy is for murderers and not for the murdered; also why your psychic vision takes in executions but not the crimes which necessitated them; also why, if Compassion is our only Law, criminals who show none are to have the full benefit of it, and honest, peaceable folk are to be left unprotected. (4) Consult reason, the moral sense, and the statistics of jurisprudence. (5) Note that there is an immediate way to the cessation of executions,—let the murderers stop murdering. *Que Messieurs les assassins commencent!* But we have to begin at the right end. (6) Picture to yourself a community governed by the visions of psychics, business and legislation regulated by mediums, sentimentalists,

and spooks. And (7), digest the fact that, if you show "compassion" to a murderer and thereby so lessen the deterrent effect of punishment as to produce two new murders, you are not merely practicing "compassion" on the one who does not deserve it, but are increasing crime with its karma, and are guilty of the gravest cruelty to individuals and to the community.

QUESTION XXXIII.

What is the origin of evil, and what will be the end of it?

* * * The word "evil" is that which is used as the antithesis to "good," but as both good and evil are always relative, there cannot yet be a standard from which to judge and answer. That which we call evil may not be so always. A life of misery is called an evil, but its result is to carry off bad karma, and if it implants good qualities, then it is not evil; and a life of ease and opportunity may be an unmixed evil to the so-called fortunate one. I could not answer this question unless the asker will state what evil it is for which an origin is sought. But, generally speaking, it may be said that the origin of evil and the origin of good are the same—that is, action.

Ans.—This is one of the oldest questions in religious philosophy, and not solvable in a few lines in the FORUM. Moral evil is doubtless meant, not mere imperfection but positive wrong. Now all aberration from the right course, all direct opposition to the harmony and well-being which are secured in the universe through Law, must be the result of volition, and that volition must itself be the result of desire inconsonant with the universal good. In other words, evil comes from selfishness, the determination to gain one's own ends, no matter if law be broken, rights be sacrificed, or confusion introduced. We see this in operation all around us, and are at no loss to account for the wrongs and outbreaks and scandals which afflict the community. What is the source of each one of these must have been the source of the first evil. So, too, the cure is no less evident. It is a return to the realm of law, the repudiation of every act which conflicts with harmony or disjoins the individu-

al from the Whole. This is all that can here be said, for the mission of the FORUM is not to discuss mere curious problems in philosophy or ethics, but to help Theosophists to intelligent and practical ideas.

QUESTION XXXIV.

How can a person lessen the number of his incarnations?

Ans.—By lessening the causes producing them. Such a cause is every taste or habit which intensifies devotion to material over spiritual life. The relation which the two divisions of man's life bear to each other determines the stage in evolution he has reached. If his most heartfelt interest is in matters pertaining to earth; if his first thought is for business, amusement, love, acquisition of property, and other pursuits concerned with the body; if he enjoys mental culture as a purely intellectual thing, a training of the lower Manas disconnected from the higher; if he barely recognizes the existence of a spiritual being within, and gives it no more attention than to observe the duties which honesty and conscientiousness exact; his affinities are evidently with earth. Conversely, if his deepest interest is in matters of the unseen sphere; if his ever-present thought is of aspiration, enlightenment, relief from error, evil, and change, the unchecked inflow of all the richest forces from highest being; if books and learning are valued as steps for ascent to the plane where intuition takes their place; if bodily existence has for him no inherent worth, and its requirements met because karma, the rights of others, and the due evolution of himself and the race so order; his affinities are evidently with spirit.

Furthermore, the direction of a current foretells its destination. If a man's interests are here, he will certainly come back here. Why should he go anywhere else? And he will certainly come back here just so long as there is any attraction to bring him. Only when the last filament of material sympathy is dissolved will he be totally free for a spiritual existence. But it never will have dissolved while there is a craving unsatisfied, a fault uncured, a faculty untrained, or a passion uncurbed.

There is only one way, then, by which a person can lessen

the number of his incarnations. It is that transformation of his character and desires which makes the earth no longer a suitable place for him. Nothing is more certain than that *he will go where he belongs.* If he wishes to go to Nirvana, he will fit himself for Nirvana. There is no other means.

This is not saying that he should become a recluse, spend days in the contemplation of his navel, or adopt any practices which are outlandish or absurd. The glowing adjurations of Divine Teachers contain no unsocial follies, but exhort to the tenderest ministrations, the most rational discipline, the most far-reaching principle. It is not the wielding of Occult powers, but the attainment of a character which would make one fit to wield them, that they emphasize. It is not even the reaching of Nirvana, but rather the acquirement of a nature Nirvanic in its purity. And while it is quite true that this cannot be done in one incarnation, it is no less true that every spiritual quality gained or material element dropped in this incarnation will diminish the need, and therefore the number, of incarnations to come.

QUESTION XXXV.

I have often noticed that, after I had been for some time pondering over a subject, it would be discussed in the next issue of the Path or the FORUM. *Is there an unconscious connection between minds that causes this, or is it a mere coincidence?*

Ans.—It may be a mere coincidence. Coincidences, of course, do happen in life. But when those of a class happen repeatedly, we infer a law or a force behind them. The simplest explanation would be that, in the comparatively small group of Theosophists, all occupied with much the same topics, any particular topic would be quite likely to simultaneously arrest the attention of one Theosophist who was a student and of another who was a writer. A slightly more recondite explanation is that the mind-force set going in one quarter would be likely to impress itself in another quarter, distance being no obstacle. A still deeper theory would be that ideas, moving in cycles, might touch two minds on the same curve. And still a fourth possibility is that Adepts, in their work, may deliberately set in mo-

tion currents intended to reach many students at the same time. But the FORUM cannot affirm any one of these explanations in any particular case, simply because it does not *know*.

QUESTION XXXVI.

Are Theosophical doctrines identical with Buddhistic theology, i. e., are Theosophists necessarily Buddhists? Why do Theosophists in general have more respect for Buddhism than for Christianity?

Ans.—There are certain basic ideas common to all religions, their variant superficial expression being due to the combination with them of other ideas, philosophic, national, local, etc. Theosophy pierces through the superficial expression down to the common basis, and recognizes the truths which all hold alike. It cannot, therefore, be said that Theosophy identifies itself with any one religious system; and, in fact, the Theosophical Society welcomes to membership the adherents of every creed.

There are, however, certain points in the comparison of religions which Theosophy is quite at liberty to note. One is the extent to which a religion, in its historic development, has conserved the principles of its Founder. Now there is nothing more conspicuous in Christianity than its gradual transmutation into a system wholly opposed to the teachings of Jesus. His simple ethical injunctions, void of doctrine and redolent of love, have been turned into a complicated dogmatic theology, wrought out by ingenious dialectics, supported by a hierarchy and by elaborate ecclesiastical machinery, and enforced by religious persecution and war. In its views of God, man, truth, duty, right aspiration, there is no greater contrast conceivable than that between the Religion of Christ and the Christian Religion. Another point is the clearness with which some doctrines, very essential to a right understanding of human life and to its proper aim, have been expressed in their several Sacred Books and cults. Prominent among these are Karma and Rëincarnation, as well as the effort after liberation from the Wheel of Rebirth. Still another point is the historic effect upon nations of the religion they have held, the effect in purity, regard for life and rights, peaceableness, energy, progress. These things are, indeed, not

wholly the result of creeds or to be conditioned on them, but they are much influenced by beliefs on duty and destiny.

Now it appears to many thinkers, especially to Theosophists, that the principles of Buddha have been better conserved by his followers than have those of Jesus by his; that the doctrines above mentioned are more explicitly stated and more influential in Buddhism than in Christianity; and that there is a smaller percentage of crime and a less aggressive individualism among Buddhists than among Christians. They may not at all be prepared to prefer the social torpor of Orientals to the vigorous progressiveness of the West; but, looking simply at the quality of the respective doctrines and at their influence upon their adherents, may warm rather to the Buddhists.

This is probably a temperate statement of the case. There is another element worth noting, *viz:* that Eastern literature provides manuals for culture on distinctively Occult lines, which Western does not. This to students of a certain bent is a matter of importance. Nor, in accounting for the reverence felt by many for Buddhism, must we omit the influence of distance. The drawbacks to Christianity are patent, being around us; those to Buddhism are only perceived upon the spot. It is very natural that a somewhat rosy tint should by given it by its remoteness.

A fair conclusion would therefore seem to be, that Theosophy will not lead to any large shifting from one religion to another, but that it will both tend to the purifying of each and evoke sympathy and a perception of respective merit among the adherents to various faiths. This is better and more philosophic than proselyting.

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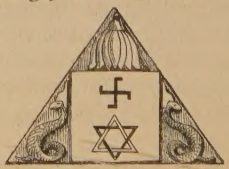

Printed on the Aryan Press.